

SGI President Ikeda's Essay Women Shine

Women who are fighting for something they believe in are beautiful. In the SGI, their dedication to the happiness of their friends and fellow members shines with purity and warmth. Their lives exude compassion, optimism and vitality. Their faces always wear a bright smile, as befits these wonderful champions of kosen-rufu, our women's division members.

Now the members are all praising and warmly supporting our district women's division leaders and vice leaders: "They are the most beautiful, the most brilliant, the most outstanding of all!"

This summer I proposed that we change the women's division titles *chiku tan* and *chiku kanji* (literally, district person-in-charge and district staff) to *chiku fujin bucho* and *chiku fuku fujin bucho* (literally, district women's division leader and district women's vice leader). This proposal was discussed by the Soka Gakkai women's division executive conference and adopted.

I want to explain my reasons behind this suggestion.

Women will create the momentum for fresh growth and development.

This was my thinking: Who is it that will create the momentum for fresh growth and development in each district as we prepare to launch into the 21st century? The answer is clear: the women's division.

We must turn to the women's division, especially the district-level leaders. That is why I suggested the new titles — out of my wish that they will embark on a new phase, with a fresh spirit and a fresh determination, in their activities to promote Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

The titles district person-in-charge and district staff have a long tradition in our organization. They have become symbolic of the women's division. But titles should express reality.

The district persons-in-charge, for instance, have not merely been "in charge." In most cases, their roles have far transcended their titles, and they have virtually come to *represent* the district. What title, then, would better describe their true role? Since the district persons-in-charge have had responsibility for every aspect of the district, it might be more accurate to call them district presidents. Unfortunately, that doesn't leave any room for the men's district leader! With that in mind, the women's division executive conference magnanimously settled on the more literal title of district women's division chief.

In the Soka Gakkai, there are women's division leaders on the national level, as well as the regional, prefectural, ward, zone and chapter levels. These distinctions are only a matter of functions and roles within the organization; they have nothing to do with greater or lesser degrees of faith. The requirements for women's division leaders are the same at every level: faith, a strong sense of responsibility to work for kosen-rufu and initiative. As far as I am concerned, each of our district women's division leaders is equally qualified, in terms of faith, to be a national women's division leader. This is why the Gakkai is so strong.

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There's no greater honor than working for the happiness of all.

After we married, my wife was the group women's division leader of the Meguro Group of Kamata Chapter for a short while. In those days, groups consisted of several units, and a group was roughly equivalent to our present district. My wife was in her 20s then, and the unit women's division leaders and most of the group members were older than she. That inspired her to work twice as hard as anyone else, and she engaged herself busily in propagation activities and in encouraging and supporting her fellow members, a smile always on her face.

"There's no greater honor than working for the happiness of all," she used to say. I fondly recall how she'd cheerfully set out into the blustery winter cold to undertake various Gakkai activities, leading our eldest son by the hand with our second son strapped to her back.

I try to be very aware of the hardships faced by our district women's division leaders and vice leaders. Many have small children to care for. Some of them are holding down jobs. Many are also delivering the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

How noble they are, as day after day they devote themselves to the wonderful work of kosen-rufu, as they burn with a sense of mission! People like this embody the most beautiful, the most admirable volunteer spirit. A brilliant sun of joy shines in their hearts. They are regal champions of the spirit, and the road they walk leads to the palace of absolute happiness.

Their efforts will imbue their lives with the golden hue of eternal good fortune and beautifully luminous character.

When our districts flourish, the Gakkai as a whole succeeds.

The district is the home port of kosen-rufu. Just as ships take on fuel and supplies in a port before they set out to sea, our members set forth from the district and gather there again to refuel. When our districts flourish, the Gakkai as a whole succeeds. A leader without a firm footing in a district is like a ship without an anchor, floating aimlessly.

It is the district leaders who keep our districts, our home ports, running smoothly. And their unity is a strong seawall that protects our members.

The reason I suggested that the title of district staff be changed to district women's division vice leader is that I would like these vice leaders to have the same sense of responsibility as the leaders they are supporting and strive to forge even stronger unity at the district level.

A leader and vice leader have an indivisible relationship. Only when they communicate, respect each other, get in rhythm and work together can they set the wheels in motion for success.

The 21st century is the Century of Women. May you advance with pride in your mission as pioneers, along a path of joy, of flowers, of rainbows.